

KOSOVO–SERBIA NEGOTIATIONS (2018) AND ITS INFLUENCE ON MACEDONIAN FUTURE

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Western Balkans countries tend to overcome “Balkanization” as a negative characteristic. The common goal of all Western Balkans countries is to become part of NATO and EU. Relations between the countries face obstacles which have become a decades-long historical and political baggage. After the end of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, the independence of Kosovo leads to a series of issues which are significant for the whole region, especially for the Republic of Serbia and Republic of Macedonia. In fact, Kosovo has been at the center of attention of many international actors for nearly twenty years, and decision makers in Macedonia must not ignore possible future scenarios and developments in relation to Kosovo and potential repercussions. Those scenarios are fundamental for Macedonian future, because of the fact that the second largest ethnic community in the Republic of Macedonia is the Albanian community. Having that in mind we need to approach this issue much more seriously.

Therefore we have had three main situations regarding the relations between Kosovo and Macedonia.

The first one was related to the refugee crises in 1999, when more than 350.000 refugees from Kosovo fled to Macedonian territory. According to the Macedonian authorities, during that period Macedonia was ready to accept not more than 20.000 refugees. This situation led to long-term consequences which contributed to an increased number of Kosovars living in Macedonia. Meanwhile, many young Macedonian Albanians joined the ranks of Kosovo Liberation Army fighting the Serbian forces, while villages on the Macedonian border with Kosovo became their logistic bases.¹

The second one was in 2001, when Macedonia was faced with an armed insurgence by the Albanian ethnic community. On the 12 of August 2001 the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was signed by the two biggest Macedonian parties VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, and the two biggest parties representing the ethnic Albanians of Macedonia at the time, DPA and PDP, in the presence of the international community. While OFA’s immediate purpose was to put an end to the eight-month long armed conflict between the Albanian National Liberation Army and the Macedonia’s Defense Forces, its long term perspective

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¹ 2004, Z. Daskalovski, “Democratic consolidation and the ‘stateness’ problem: The case of Macedonia”, Journal: Global review of Ethnopolitics

was to establish a general framework for integration of the national minorities and to provide legislative bases for a functional multicultural cohabitation².

The third one is linked with the Independence of Kosovo and the Macedonian recognition of Kosovo. Macedonia recognized Kosovo on 9 October 2008, together with Montenegro. Serbia reacted with a month long severance of diplomatic relations with Macedonia.

Nowadays, the whole region is faced with the “waves of solutions” with the perspective of integration into NATO and EU as a final aim. Macedonian and Greek government signed the “Prespa Agreement” a solution for the three decades issue with the name “Republic of Macedonia”. On the 30th of September Macedonian citizens will take part in a referendum, answering the question: “Do you support EU and NATO membership by accepting the agreement between Macedonia and Greece?” International community is present in Macedonia with the strong commitment “If you want to be part of the EU and NATO associations the referendum must succeed”. If the referendum in Republic of Macedonia succeeds the geopolitical picture will change not only for Macedonia, but for the region. There are a number of scenarios related to the results of the referendum and security situation in the region. Kosovo and Serbia have intensive negotiation process which produces frightening news on daily bases. Those two situations pose the same risk for the security in the region, especially vis-a-vis the Albanian communities in Macedonia, and their reactions for the Kosovo issue.

After the last, early called parliamentary elections of 2016, the parties of Albanians in Macedonia were essential for forming a government, unlike the past experiences of coalition between the Macedonian and Albanian parties on the ‘gentlemen’ principle of maintaining good inter-ethnic relations. Thus, the Albanian block found itself as a strategic player in the government coalition’s bargaining process and made joint strategy for realization of their programmatic stances. Namely, soon after the 2016 Elections, the three Albanian parties Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), Alliance of Albanians and BESA Movement, presented the “Common Platform of Albanian parties”. This Platform was their basic instrument in the negotiation process. According to the political parties that signed the platform this document is written in the spirit of consensual democracy, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), and it aims for better inter-ethnic coexistence and quicker accession of Macedonia to the EU and NATO.³

² 2016, Josipa Rizankoska and Jasmina Trajkoska, “The implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, true party commitment towards better inter-ethnic cohabitation in Macedonia or a strategic tool for party competition?”, Journal of Liberty and International affairs, Available at: <http://e-jlia.com/current>

³ In the part dealing with the improvement of inter-ethnic coexistence the platform stipulates the following changes in the Macedonian society: the Albanian ethnic community to become a nation-building community; full bilingualism (the Macedonian and the Albanian language to be official languages); debate for changing of the country’s flag, change of the anthem and the national emblem which should reflect multiethnic reality in

In that period spokesmen of DUI, Bujar Osmani, now Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of Republic of Macedonia for European Affairs, after a meeting with Hashim Tachi, said: "Albanian states, Kosovo and Albania are interested in stability in Macedonia, in stability in the region, in Macedonia where the Albanian community is equal and part of the decision making processes, but united and coordinated in their approaches. DUI will ratify "Common Platform of Albanian Parties..." the following day. The new government was formed in May 2017; the new Law on Languages (Albanian language to be second official language in Republic of Macedonia) is passed without respect to the Regulatory Assessment Instrument, while the regulation was promoted under the EU flag. Just as the OFA's implementation was lost in the internal coalition bargaining processes during the decade long governing period by VMRO DPMNE and DUI, the Law on the use of Languages is under the threat to become just another ill-implemented policy by the SDSM-DUI government, if more care is not taken of the rule of law and the political support for the policies that are to be negotiated between the coalition partners.⁴ The above elaboration is to explain how the inter-ethnic issues came back on the political agenda once more, and how ethnocentrism has risen within both Macedonian and Albanian blocks. All this is more in agreement with Kosovo's than with Albanian's politicians.

Taking into consideration the latest event, the visit of the Serbian President Vucic to Kosovo on the 09th of September 2018, we could see the possibility of provoking the first scenario which means preserving the status quo, and at the same time postponing the problem-solution. Vucic unsuccessful visit of the village Banje because of the 200 demonstrators, in the media was shown: "Vucic slammed NATO-led peacekeepers for not clearing the blockade and accused Kosovo Albanian authorities of backing it"⁵. This situation could lead to silence between the negotiators, but not in the long term. Republic of Macedonia is facing one of the biggest challenges since its independence and crisis in 2001, consultative referendum, which allow politicians to make different decision if they make absolute majority in the Parliament. The main focus nowadays in Macedonia is on the upcoming referendum and all other issues are set aside. Bilateral relations with Kosovo have

Macedonia and ethnic equality; adoption of a Resolution in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia condemning the genocide against the Albanian people in Macedonia in the period 1912-1956; Creation of a Ministry for Political System and Inter-Community Relations as a competent body for respecting the rights of communities and encouraging economic and social development in underdeveloped areas; Taking affirmative measures for securing financing of Albanian cultural institutions at central and local level; Creation of a central institution for the promotion of the languages of the communities, which will provide preparation of translators, editors and lecturers; Inclusion of Albanians in the working group for direct negotiations with Greece about the "name issue"; Complete clarification of issues and court procedures such as "Sopot", "Brodec", "Monstrum" and "Kumanovo" through an inquiry committee or an international independent body.

⁴ 2018, Jasmina Trajkoska and Josipa Rizankoska, KNOWLEDGE-International Journal, Vol 22.3, 'Ethnocentrism and party politics: are political parties devoted to the project of building multicultural Macedonian society on the path to EU?'. ISSN 2545-4439, ISSN 1857-923X

⁵ "Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic blocked from visiting Kosovo Serb village", available on <https://www.dw.com/en/serbias-president-aleksandar-vucic-blocked-from-visiting-kosovo-serb-village/a-45419704>, 13.09.2018

been successfully consolidated. The president of Kosovo Hashim Tachi visited Macedonia on the 12th of September, after his visit to the Macedonian Government, he asked Macedonian citizens to vote in favor in the referendum. "You have concluded the agreement with Greece, now it is Kosovo and Serbia's turn to find a solution by dialogue. You know that this will not be an easy process, to make a historic decision to resolve the issues between Kosovo and Serbia, but that's why dialogue exists. We have many barriers, but I am optimistic, because it is better to reach an agreement now rather than three decades later. I will make a huge effort to reach an agreement with Serbia which means reciprocal recognition", said Thaci.⁶ The major interest and goal of the Western international community is to overcome those two issues to achieve stability and security in our region. Considering the inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo and Macedonia, if the situation about negotiation processes is status quo, and the referendum in Macedonia is successful we will have stable security position. But if the referendum doesn't succeed, there is a possibility for an unstable situation security-wise. My personal expectations are related to the successful referendum. International community make maximum effort to influence Macedonian citizens so they make the "right" choice and vote for the referendum to succeed. The status quo situation in negotiation between Kosovo and Serbia will not be a long term one. Negotiations will follow, and other two scenarios are possible.

The second scenario, Serbia-Kosovo border changes/swapping of territories is the most frightening one, because of the domino effect. In the history we have some similar examples which are not so good examples. In the last three decades, territorial delineation along ethnic lines proved inadequate and forced solution which does not bring resolution of conflicts and stabilization of peace, but only armed conflicts, terrorism, displacement and continuation of ethnic conflicts. If the two sides decide for this scenario that will influence the internal politics of the Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. The United States openly accepts this idea as a solution if Serbia and Kosovo politicians can reach an agreement. The European Union is of an opinion that "border changing on the basis of ethnic lines, always open other different issues...". They are for a solution in accordance with the international law. Having in mind the wars after the Yugoslavia dissolution, the memories of which are still present, and politics based on ethnocentrism and populism in all of those countries, this kind of scenario will be an unpleasant solution. The western part of the Republic of Macedonia has excellent informal relationship with Kosovo; Macedonian Albanians are also related to the Kosovars on many levels. If politicians decide to make border changing/swapping of territories, after all the challenges we have had to prevail over, it will mean taking a step back. Ethnic nationalism will rise, populism is present anyway, and bilateral relations between Kosovo and Macedonia on the central level will lead to a sensitive phase. Only in this scenario I could see a possibility for endangering security in the region of South East Europe. Ethnocentrism on the last early parliamentary

⁶ "A successful referendum means peace for Kosovo", available at <http://meta.mk/en/tag/hashim-tachi/>, 19.09.2018

election 2016 in the Republic of Macedonia was present among all political parties, Law on languages, 'Common Platform of Albanian parties'. The "new square" in Skopje on the other side of Vardar became reality which is a difficult thing to accept for Macedonians. Another sign of ethnocentrism, before the last wave of negotiation between Macedonia and Greece, was changing the name of the motorway from 'Alexander the Great' to 'Friendship'. One of the major motorways was called 'Alexander the Great' and the other, which lead to the west part of the country, is called 'Mother Theresa'. This is not so crucial at a glance, but tells us a lot.

Those are the facts which should be taken into consideration when we want to make a decision which will lead us closer to European values and European Union. We should work on inter-ethnic coexistence and multiculturalism, not for 'clean territories'. Considering democratic capacities of the states and politicians in the region, influences from the international community as well as still fresh war memories among the citizens, we couldn't afford this scenario, because it will bring consequences that will not help in making for a better future.

The third scenario, normalization of relations based on a legally binding bilateral agreement to be reached through the ongoing EU moderated Serbia-Kosovo negotiations is one of the better solutions. Conforming to the United Nations Assembly Resolution 64/298⁷, 2011, the path to normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is through the EU-facilitated dialogue, known as the Brussels Dialogue. This resolution is illustrated as "normalization with the aim of achieving peace, security and stability in the Western Balkans, and promoting cooperation and European integration to improve living conditions for all people". Common goal for Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia is to become members of the European Union. The main changes which should be done for progress towards the European Union membership are improvement of the rule of law, respect for the human rights and protection of minorities, enhancing the business environment, developing a competitive private sector, and reducing high unemployment rates. Also, all these countries should find a way for transparent and comprehensive, merit-based procedures for employment in public administration. All those challenges are in favor of "European future" and building stronger democratic capacities among the countries in the region. This common ambition is a powerful anchor for resolving the issues through dialogue and normalization of relations. The two very big issues in the Western Balkans are the name dispute from Greek side about the Republic of Macedonia and status of Kosovo. After twenty-seven years of negotiation the signing of "Prespa Agreement" brings hope to the region and should be used as an example for the negotiation process between Serbia and Kosovo. The Brussels Dialogue should be achieving significant progress towards normal relations. In fact, the ultimate goal is the "full normalization" of relations, achieved through

⁷ UN GS Resolution 64/298, available at: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/298

negotiations on EU membership in the case of Serbia, and through the SAA implementation in the case of Kosovo. European Union asks for legally binding agreement between sides which have legal consequences like the “Prespa Agreement” for solving the name dispute. Those solutions are not final, but should be sustainable in the long term, to achieve security and stability in the region. With the first two scenarios we could expect unsecure future and further deterioration of inter-ethnic relations. Only with changing the political will and rhetoric we could lead the region towards peace and collaboration. The politicians are still playing the nationalist and populist card, but now is the time to change the narratives and make hard decisions that will create Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia better places for living. If the decision making process in Serbia and Kosovo is democratic through the negotiations it will be useful for inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. Also, if the referendum is successful, Macedonia will be at the required level for making changes in its political system in order to approach the European Union. The Referendum is also crucial for NATO membership, and if it successful it will preclude any territorial changes.

Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo and Serbia should view the implementation of the sustainable solutions as an integral part of the dialogue, not as collateral damage. Russian influence in Serbia is significant, but this should not be an obstacle for Serbia in EU integration process. The public opinion urges deep changes in order to replace ethnic nationalism with a civic one, that’s why the policy makers should decentralize the discussion process and involve academics, political activists, journalists, NGO-workers to work on projects which will make sustainable changes on micro level. The aim of such a campaign is to increase awareness among different ethnic communities for a better European future for all. The region needs investments which would produce social and economic improvements. Economic cooperation is crucial for better communication in the region, that will lead to consolidation and an increase in the volume of production, improvement in competitiveness, in order to increase employment rates. One of the ways of strengthening cooperation in the region is to develop a common platform for economic development which will initiate economic growth, political stability and reconciliation.

The weakest links in the chain of socially useful changes are the current politicians in the whole region. If they are dedicated to European integration, they should use funds, education and recommendations to implement decisions in order to prevail over ethnic-nationalism and populism. Otherwise we will be faced with the same stories, pictures and animosity.

Forum for Ethnic relations in its Policy paper “The position of the forum for ethnic relations; normalization the way towards solution”, the part of Basic/Framework Agreement between Serbia and Kosovo in Article 2 clearly said: “In conformity with the United Nations Charter both sides to the agreement shall settle any disputes between them exclusively by

peaceful means and they will refrain from threats or use of force”⁸. This article should be main direction for all decision makers in the region. Ethnocentrism and partisanship are omnipresent in our countries, parts of the citizens are still burdened with the ideas of “great nations”, social and economic standards are lower, and the emigration of the young people is increasing. These are indicators which clearly show us that time has come for hard, but useful decisions.

Globalization is reality. Nation state is not the same creation as in the XIX century. Ethnic nationalism must be replaced with the civic nationalism. The key mechanisms to achieve stability are Euro-Atlantic integration of the region and politicians with the will and courage to accept the values of European Union.

To conclude, the status quo situation of the negotiation process between Serbia and Kosovo will not be long-lasting. If the region needs to open some of the burning issues again, it is inevitable that we could see the second scenario (Serbia-Kosovo border changes/swapping of territories) as possibility of a retrograde movement. With the latest events in the Republic of Macedonia with the Law on Languages, and “Common Platform of Albanian parties” we could clearly see that ethno-nationalism is here among us, and if we do not find appropriate politics for civic nationalism, once more the question of the status of Albanians in Macedonia will inevitably arise. With this scenario we will allow the need for “ethnically clean” territories to strengthen. We could not and should not accept this. The worst scenario is an unsuccessful referendum in Macedonia and swapping of territories between Kosovo and Serbia.

The best solution is the normalization of relations based on a legally binding bilateral agreement reached through the ongoing EU moderated Serbia-Kosovo negotiations and successful referendum in the Republic of Macedonia. That would lead to a possibility for internal reforms in the countries. These reforms mean straightening the democratic capacities, rule of law, respecting the human rights and minority rights, de-partisanship and decentralization in the decision making processes. Multiculturalism is not a fact, it is a policy. But, for me the crucial thing is the changing of political culture and social responsibility of academics, journalist, political activists, politicians, security institutions in this really crucial time for the region. We are not multicultural societies if we live “together” in our parallel worlds. Learning and practicing deliberative democracy is a challenge that we need to accept. Politicians in the region should stop building up nationalism and populism in the name of European integration. I could not see any other possibilities which are favorable for the region.

⁸ “The position of the forum for ethnic relations; normalization the way towards solution”, Full policy paper available at: <http://fer.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ENGLISH-CEO-STaVOVI.pdf> , 23.09.2018